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H PLEASE PASS TO CODEL CAPPS MEMBERS AND STAFF

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CODEL CAPPS' MAY 8-11 VISIT TO
HAITI

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Your visit comes at a critical point in Haiti's democratic development. After food riots in April 2008 and a disastrous series of hurricanes four months later, President Rene Preval and his new Prime Minister, Michele Pierre-Louis, are working hard to meet the basic needs of the population and counteract the nearly USD 1 billion in damage caused by the storms and resulting flooding. A series of high-level events in April, including a donor conference in Washington and a visit by Secretary Clinton, emphasized our determination to help the Haitian people overcome these challenges and focus international attention on Haiti. Amidst the rebuilding efforts, Haitian voters went to the polls April 19 to fill 12 vacant Senate seats in the Parliament's 30-seat Senate. Despite low voter turnout and some isolated incidents of violence, the voting was largely a success, thanks to the security and logistical support of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti. The second round of voting is set for June 7. End summary.

RIOTS, FLOODS ENDANGER YEARS OF PROGRESS

¶2. (SBU) Haiti is the hemisphere's poorest and most politically troubled country. After the collapse of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986, Haiti experienced a succession of military regimes and popularly-elected governments, interspersed with coups d'etat, the departure of an elected President in the midst of an armed rebellion, and other destabilizing events. Even democratically-elected leaders sometimes resorted to political violence or failed to hold constitutionally mandated elections. All these factors have exacerbated political instability and economic stagnation. Two years after the departure of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, the presidential and legislative elections of 2006 gave Haiti a new chance to consolidate political stability and stimulate investment and economic growth. With the over 7,000 soldiers and 2,000 police of UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) guaranteeing the peace since 2004, gang activity and other violent crime has diminished rapidly.

¶3. (SBU) However, rioting in April 2008, caused in part by rising food and energy prices, brought political progress to a halt. While there was genuine social grievance behind the April protests, much of the associated violence was organized by political forces seeking to oust then-PM Jacques-Edouard Alexis and capitalize on the resulting instability. The Senate voted to dismiss PM Alexis on April 12. In the five months following the dismissal of Alexis and his cabinet, the Haitian government was paralyzed by political gridlock. Parliament rejected two candidates for Prime Minister on specious grounds. After Preval nominated his third candidate, Michele Pierre-Louis, Haiti was hit by a series of hurricanes and tropical storms in August and September. The resulting flooding killed almost 800 people; displaced hundreds of thousands more, crippled the country's

transportation infrastructure, devastated livestock and crops, and caused nearly USD 1 billion in damage. In the face of strong public pressure to confirm a government able to respond to the hurricane damage, Parliament confirmed Pierre-Louis on September 5.

STAGNANT ECONOMY SUFFERED A BLOW IN 2008

14. (SBU) The hurricanes and resulting flooding cast a spotlight on Haiti's already dire economic situation. About 70 percent of the Haitian population lives on less than two dollars per day, and at least 60 percent are unemployed or underemployed. Investors' perceptions of security levels, inadequate infrastructure, and an inhospitable business climate deter investment in Haiti today. The 2008 storms reduced that year's growth rate to 1.3 percent, less than the 2.5 percent population growth rate. We have encouraged President Preval and the Government to help Haitian and foreign investors take maximum advantage of the second Haiti Opportunity Through Partnership Encouragement Act (HOPE II), a trade preference bill that allows many types of textiles manufactured in Haiti duty-free access to U.S. markets. That program thus far has created about 11,000 jobs.

RENEWED INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN HAITI

15. (SBU) The food riots and hurricane damage of 2008 led the United States and Haiti's other international donors to redouble their efforts to achieve progress on food security and economic growth initiatives. Recent visits by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and former President Bill

Clinton, the 15 UN Security Council Permanent Representatives, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have drawn attention to Haiti's plight. In addition, Secretary Clinton announced significant pledges of new assistance at an April 14 donor conference in Washington, including USD 20 million to create short-term jobs, USD 20 million more for debt relief, and USD 15 million in emergency food aid.

CONTROVERSY LINGERS OVER PARTIAL SENATE ELECTIONS

6 (SBU) The April 19 elections have been the object of some controversy, but they have the strong backing of the United States and the rest of the international community. The controversial decision of the electoral authority to exclude candidates from Fanmi Lavalas, the political party of deposed former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, sparked a series of small protests and a call from Lavalas militants to boycott the election. Those militants claimed victory when only 11 percent of eligible voters turned out on election day, although participation in partial legislative elections here is typically low. Some Senators have even threatened to block the accession of the victorious candidates to the Senate, although it is far from clear that they will make good on their threat.

17. (SBU) The elections themselves took place in a largely peaceful atmosphere, although some acts of violence and ballot-box theft were registered in some areas of the country. The 29 observers deployed by the Embassy April 19 reported that voting materials had generally been delivered to polling stations on time, trained poll workers effectively oversaw the voting process, and voters were generally not subjected to threats or intimidation. Elections in the Central Plateau, however, were suspended after a poll worker was shot and unknown perpetrators stole ballot boxes in some voting centers there. Electoral authorities have not yet fixed a date to re-run the elections in the Center department.

INSTITUTION-BUILDING IN PARLIAMENT: AN UPHILL BATTLE

18. (SBU) Haiti's Parliament is fractious and undisciplined

and has struggled to assume its constitutional role of passing vital legislation and serving as a check on the executive branch of government. Its leaders have found little time for institution-building, and its infrastructure and administration are in a rudimentary state. Some 19 parties, most with no structure or internal discipline, are represented in the 30-seat Senate or 99-seat Chamber of Deputies. An ad hoc "Coalition of Progressive Parliamentarians" dominates the Chamber but is entirely absent from the Senate. The Senate, with over a third of its seats vacant for nearly a year, constantly struggles to achieve a quorum. In this context, despite vigorous programs to augment the technical expertise and resources available to Deputies and Senators and strengthen Haiti's political parties, U.S.-funded efforts to strengthen the legislature as an institution have been slow to take hold.

¶9. (SBU) Leadership in both the Chamber of Deputies and Senate has changed since HDAC's 2007 visit and consultants' report. Kely Bastien, a doctor from the northern city of Cap-Haïtien, became Senate President in January 2008. He is known as a consensus-builder, often moderating the criticism of President Preval and PM Pierre-Louis noisiest detractors. In the lower house, Levaillant Louis-Jeune campaigned on the promise of reform in contrast to the former Chamber President's alleged waste and malfeasance. Louis-Jeune has been slow to take steps to reform the Chamber, although he has reportedly begun purging superfluous and unqualified workers from the Chamber's payrolls.

¶10. (SBU) Leaders of both chambers are interested in the plans for a Parliamentary Resource Center, which will be housed in an office building formerly home to the Union newspaper. Turnover in Parliamentary leadership and contracting delays have posed obstacles to the U.S.-funded renovation of the Union building, but Chamber of Deputies officers look set to approve the plans for the new building, including the Parliamentary Resource Center, this month. In the past, poor employment practices, budgetary disarray, and weak internal controls in the Parliament have posed additional challenges to the completion of the Parliamentary Resource Center and other institution-building efforts. The Parliament's little-used library is a case-in-point. Despite a near-ideal location and a generous initial donation of equipment, the library has languished with little

institutional support. It has no budget for acquisitions or equipment, and its 27 seconded staff want for work and probably lack the expertise to provide the advanced analysis of a modern legislative research service.

THE ASSISTANCE PICTURE: RULE OF LAW/GOVERNANCE

¶11. (U) The United States will provide over USD 287 million in non-emergency assistance to Haiti in 2009. Our programs in Haiti -- financed by USAID, CDC, the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL/NAS), and the U.S. Coast Guard -- seek to implement reforms, build public institutions, improve law enforcement and corrections capability, and help deliver basic services. Rule of Law programs target Haiti's justice system by helping increase judicial authorities' administrative, management and technical capacity. Good Governance programs provide technical assistance and training to Haiti's Parliament in the areas of legislative drafting, legal and judicial reform, and rules of procedure. Programs aimed at conflict mitigation address poverty and gang-related violence through creation of short- and long-term employment and transfer of job skills through labor-intensive reconstruction of social and productive infrastructure. Another program targets the Provisional Electoral Council to help it solidify its organization and modernize the voter registration process. Civil society programs assist a variety of local media, regional journalist associations, and public service associations, including those that monitor corruption.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

¶12. (U) The steep rise in food prices in 2008 followed by the four hurricanes sharply exacerbated Haiti's chronic food insecurity, to which approximately 3 million Haitians are now exposed. USAID contributed USD 45 million in emergency food aid and another USD 14 million for post-hurricane recovery. USAID is continuing its programs to build disaster early warning, response and mitigation capacity. The Ambassador officiated in November at the ground-breaking ceremony for an Emergency Operations Center for Haiti's disaster response agencies. Following the hurricanes, Congress appropriated an additional USD 96 million over three years for the restoration of public services, repairs to public use infrastructure, provision of income-generating activities, asset restoration, and support to affected families.

HEALTH AND EDUCATION/ECONOMIC GROWTH

¶13. (U) Basic health programs help increase access to essential health services in 72 public sector clinics and 80 NGO clinics. Nearly 50 percent of Haiti's population receives at least some health services financed by the USG. USAID-financed education programs include a new basic education project to strengthen the Ministry of Education's management and supervisory system, help it extend supervision over the vast private-sector education system, and provide scholarships. Social assistance programs support Haiti's most vulnerable citizens. Economic growth programs target trade and investment, financial sector programs for small and medium enterprises, and programs for agricultural productivity and marketing. Reducing environmental degradation is the goal of USD 25 million in programs that focus on restoring watersheds to thwart periodic flooding.

HIV/AIDS RELIEF

¶14. (U) Haiti has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in the Western Hemisphere. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) will provide just short of USD 100 million in FY 2009 to prevent infections and place HIV-positive persons into treatment. Implemented by USAID and CDC, PEPFAR programs target HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, but also benefit large parts of Haiti's health care system. The PEPFAR program in Haiti is the largest in the hemisphere.

POLICE REFORM/CORRECTIONS

¶15. (U) The U.S. is the lead donor in implementing the MINUSTAH/Haitian National Police (HNP) reform plan, which foresees building up the HNP from its current strength of 9,600 to 14,000 officers by the end of 2011. In concert with MINUSTAH's mandate to enhance Haiti's border security, the

U.S. Coast Guard provides training for the Haitian Coast Guard, financed by INL/NAS. Facility renovations, additional boats, and a new operating base on the north coast will be funded by INL/NAS in 2009. The U.S. made a commitment in 2007 to assist in improving the conditions and respect for human rights in Haiti's prison system, and remains the lead donor to Haiti in this sector.

SANDERSON